

סכות, שמיני עצרת, ושמחת תורה בתורה? SUKKOT, SH'MINI ATZERET, & SIMHAT TORAH IN THE TORAH?

Then God spoke to Moses saying: Tell the children of Israel saying: 'On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the seven-day Festival of Booths for God. On the first day will be a holy day; no form of work will you do. You will make burnt offerings to God for seven days. The eighth day will be a holy day for you and you will make a burnt offering to God. It will be a conclusion. You may not perform any sort of work. (Leviticus 23:33-36).

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לַה':
בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ כָּל-מְלָאכָת
עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּקְרִיבוּ
אֲשָׁה לַה' בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה
לָכֶם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֲשָׁה לַה' עֶצְרֵת הוּא
כָּל-מְלָאכָת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: (ויקרא
כג:33-36)

Read the title of this study sheet carefully. What seems strange about it?

What festivals are mentioned in the Torah text above and how long do they last?

From what you know about the cycle of festivals in the month of Tishrei, is anything missing? If so, what? (Feel free to look at a Jewish calendar/in your yoman).

**If Simhat Torah is not mentioned in the Torah, where does it come
from??????????**

What does the festival of Simhat Torah celebrate? What do we do that night and the next day? How is the day supposed to feel? What are we supposed to do?

Do some research on the *simhat beit ha-sho'eivah* ritual and ceremony. Answer the following questions:

- 1) When did it occur in the course of the Jewish calendar?
- 2) How was it celebrated (what did people do)?
- 3) Where and when in Jewish history and life was it celebrated?
- 4) What was the general feeling of the ritual?
- 5) What happened to this tradition and ritual? Why can we not do it anymore?
- 6) If you lived in the generation of the destruction of the Temple, how would you feel about losing the traditions and rituals that you have known for your whole life?

With this information in mind, consider the following text:

Chapter 5, mishna 1

פרק ה, משנה א

It was said: "One who has not seen the water-drawing celebration has never seen joy is his/her life."

...אמר, כל מי שלא ראה שמחה
בית השואבה, לא ראה שמחה
מימיו:

Do you see any similarities between what was the *simhat beit ha'sho'eivah* and Simhat Torah? Do you think Judaism changed a little bit or a lot after the destruction of the Second Temple? Once the Temple was gone, what became the CENTER of Jewish life and practice? Would you be willing to make any suggestions about where Simhat Torah comes from based on some of these ideas from Jewish history? Think about it and share your ideas.

The Halakhic Source for our “*Simḥat Torah*”

The Shulhan Arukh (The Set Table) is a code of Jewish law which combines the work of Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488-1575) and Rabbi Moses Isserles (1520-1572), written during in the 16th century. Karo’s work is law for the Sefaradi community and Isserles’ gloss contains commentary from the Ashkenazi world. The first mention of the title of the festival *Simḥat Torah* can be found in a work called The Arba’ah Turim (The Four Pillars) written by Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (1270-c.1340). Before that time, there is no evidence of the festival being called by that name. The first reference to this day on the Jewish calendar as a holiday is in the Talmud, where it is called “the second day of *Shmini Atzeret*.” Going back to the time of the Talmud, SOME of the Torah reading customs for the day were the same, but some were also different. Reading through all the sources over the centuries shows the *Simḥat Torah* is a special and unique festival which took on a life of its own in the Jewish community, instead of being dictated either by Torah or the Rabbis. All that was required by the Rabbis after the exile was that the second day of *yom tov* be celebrated like on all other festivals.

Shulhan Arukh, Orakh Hayyim, 669

The Order of *Simḥat Torah* Day

Rabbi Joseph Karo, with Ashkenazi gloss written by Rabbi Moshe Isserles

In a place where they do two days of *yom tov*, on the ninth night (of Sukkot) kiddush is recited and on the next day, three Torah scrolls are taken out. In the first, one reads “*V’Zot Ha’Brakha*” until the end of the Torah. In the second, one reads “*B’reishit*” until “*asher bara Elohim la’asot*.” In the third, one reads the *maftir* reading as on the previous day and recites “*And so it was after the death of Moses*” as the Haftarah. This last day of *yom tov* is called “*Simḥat Torah*” since one celebrates and holds a festive meal on the occasion of completing the Torah. It is a custom for the ones who finish the Torah and begin *B’reishit* to pledge monetary gifts and to call upon others to make a party. In these countries, it was also a custom to remove all the Torah scrolls in the sanctuary on *Simḥat Torah* evening and morning and to recite songs and praises, with each individual location doing so according to its own custom. They also had a custom to circulate around the *bimah* of the synagogue in the same way as they did with the *lulav*. And all is in the name of happiness. It was also a custom to maximize the number of people who read from the Torah, and they would read one section many times, and there is no prohibition on this issue. It was also a custom to call all the young people to the Torah and the section “The angel who redeems...” is read for them. And at night, all the oaths that are in the Torah are read, each individual location doing so according to its custom. It was also a custom to have a young boy be the one who finishes the Torah even though there are those who say that it should be a wise and learned student who needs to complete it. In this time, when it is the Torah reader/Cantor who does the reading, there is nor reason to be concerned. In a location where there are only two Torah scrolls, “*V’Zot Ha’Brakha*” is read from the first, “*B’reishit*” from the second, then they go and take the first one and read the reading for the day from it (for the *maftir*). This is what is done in any place with regard to the matter of three Torah scrolls and they have only two.

Make a numbered list of all the customs described by Rabbi Joseph Karo and Rabbi Moses Isserles:
